

# Road work near Carson gets top priority

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## *Interchange at I-25 would cost \$50 million*

By KYLE HENLEY THE GAZETTE

DENVER - Expanding highway access for Fort Carson is the No. 1 priority for El Paso County under a statewide ballot measure that asks voters to approve \$1.2 billion in bonds for highway projects.

Local officials say they need a \$50 million improvement to the interchange at Interstate 25 and State Highway 16 to accommodate the nearly 10,000 new troops that are expected at Fort Carson in the coming years as other military bases close across the country.

Colorado Springs Mayor Lionel Rivera said the federal Base Realignment and Closure process – or BRAC – will mean an additional 20,000 to 25,000 new residents — soldiers and their families — in the southern part of the city, Fountain and El Paso County

“A lot of those folks live off base . . . and that’s important for the region,” Rivera said.

Traffic backs up on I-25 at the exit for Highway 16 – sometimes as much as 1 mile from the exit – and more people will add to the congestion.

That was one of two projects that local transportation officials asked the Colorado Department of Transportation to put on the list of 59 projects that would be funded by the measure, called Referendum D.

The second big project is \$52 million in improvements to the interchange at I-25 and Cimarron Street, in the heart of Colorado Springs.

The Colorado Transportation Commission on Wednesday discussed all proposed statewide projects and is scheduled to sign off on the list today. Together, the two local projects ask for \$102 million, above the \$82 million slated for the region under Referendum D.

CDOT Director Tom Norton was angry that the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, a consortium of regional cities and counties that does transportation planning, submitted the two projects.

Norton said El Paso County officials are misleading the public into thinking both projects will be completed if the highway measure is approved by voters in November.

“They keep coming back and coming back and saying I want more money, and it’s not there,” Norton said. “This makes me very, very nervous.”

Rivera and other elected officials on the PPACG board hope that the Department of Defense will provide at least \$10 million for the I-25 and Highway 16 interchange. Other savings might be realized by including the I-24 and Cimarron project with expansion of I-25 through Colorado Springs, which is just beginning.

The two projects are such high priorities that the city and El Paso County say they will curtail plans to repave other roads to come up with the money for the two projects.

“Mr. Norton may be upset, but the region thinks these two projects are important,” Rivera said, adding that if the ballot measure passes in November, “the PPACG board will find the money.”

Those two projects weren’t the only options on the table. PPACG officials also were considering \$16 million in improvements to I-25 and Baptist Road, a fast-growing area in northern El Paso County, and a \$46.7 million interchange at Fillmore and I-25.

Terry Schooler, the CDOT commissioner who represents Colorado Springs, said the Fort Carson project is important because the post’s expansion is expected to bring \$1 billion in new business into the region and Colorado as a whole.

“We’ve got a billion dollar investment that benefits all of the state,” he said. “I think we need to keep that in perspective. The whole state has a vested interest in this project.”

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## **MAJOR PROJECTS**

### **Widen I-25 through Castle Rock:**

\$39.6 million

### **Improve interchange at I-25/Ridgeway:**

\$7 million

### **Improve interchange I-25 and SH 16 near Fort Carson:**

\$50 million

### **Improve Interchange I-25 and SH 24 in Colorado Springs:**

\$52 million

### **Improve I-25 through Trinidad:**

\$43 million

### **Improve I-25 and Eden interchange in Pueblo:**

\$13 million

### **Improve U.S. 50/SH 115 in Cañon City:**

\$1 million

### **Improve U.S. 160 from Monte Vista to Alamosa:**

\$5.5 million

### **Improve C-470 and Sante Fe interchange:**

\$30 million Complete list at [gazette.com](http://gazette.com)



Lionel Rivera:  
Says he hopes Department of Defense will toss in \$10 million.